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reached also the peasantry in the districts and some of the riverain population.

From the beginning, then, Islamization in Nupe was bound up with political interests and represented a change 'from above'. During the long-drawn internal wars which accompanied the Fulani rise to power acceptance of Islam meant identifying oneself with the new regime. Even today Islam stands for some such identification, with the powers that be, with the social élite, and implicitly with the culture that grew up in the capital where that power is centred and the élite resides. Islam thus added to the unification of the conquest-state, extending the area of a common culture over a population otherwise unified only by political means. More precisely, it transformed a mere holding-together, ultimately by coercion, into a belonging-together—the conscious belonging-together that goes with a shared creed.

This twin machinery of unification, political and religious, was not an entirely new thing. When the Fulani established their rule over Nupe they did so over a society itself held together essentially by political means. For though the older Nupe kingdom had grown from within the Nupe tribe and largely coincided with it, it did not rest on 'tribal' solidarity or unity alone. Rather, the political unity of the kingdom was superimposed upon heterogeneous tribal sections, autonomous communities, and a population bound to widely diverse religious practices. So that on this level already the state had to create its own religious supports. The emblems of the ancestor king Tsoede and the myths and rituals associated with his person stand in this sense for the kingdom and its overriding unity; much as the 'state church' of Islam stands for Fulani rule. But there are these differences. Islam, of course, is a religion in its own right, and one open to any country or regime; while the religious observances surrounding Nupe kingship derived their sacred import only from this association and have no meaning outside the political or national setting. The 'royal cults' and myths, therefore, specifically buttressed sovereignty and tied the population to the institution of kingship; Islam does so only incidentally and indirectly, through being the faith of sovereign and ruling class. Finally, the royal cults were merely added to the series of rituals peculiar to the various communities and tribal sections; their diverse religious life was left intact, being only made to include some observance expressive of the new 'belonging-together'. Islam supersedes all the diverse beliefs and practices; it makes proselytes, not scattered cult members, and involves complete identification, not merely the acceptance of tokens of identity.

These contrasts reflect both the different potentialities of Islam

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and of the pagan cults, and the different conditions in which the religious unification occurred, here following upon an alien domination, and there buttressing an indigenous kingdom still 'tribal' in many respects. It is difficult to draw any general conclusion from this fortuitous combination of two sets of factors. It may seem suggestive that the alien conquest and the indigenous state employed religion in radically different ways. But then, the particular employment of religion in support of the alien conquest also accorded with the potentialities of the religion professed by the conquerors. In other words, the alien ruling group happened to carry with it a creed which, being proselytizing and non-tribal, seems to have offered precisely the support their regime demanded; and this being so, it is futile to speculate on the kind of situation that would have arisen had the conquerors not professed such a suitable creed. Indeed, without the impetus of Islam the whole conquest would probably not have taken place or taken that particular form. We may point out two things, however.

The Islamization of the country is far from complete, both in that it reached only a portion of the population and in that it often remained superficial. Thus Islam, far from superseding the indigenous ceremonials, often merely furnished new, additional ones. The new ceremonials stand for a common cult, no more; and this in turn stands for a new unity, of the Mohammedan regime and the conquest-state: but it stands for it only as another 'token of identity'. So that the regime based on conquest is still employing the same religious support which characterized the indigenous kingdom. If this means that the potentialities of Islam have not (or not yet) been fully utilized, in other respects they required correction. For Islam points beyond the state which may adopt it for its church; for the Nupe, it means conversion to a creed uniting a vast population in Nigeria and West Africa (though few Nupe would think of Islam as a world religion). Also, as we have said, this creed of a ruling class lacks the explicit reference to sovereignty which the pagan 'royal cults' possessed. Thus, to serve as a buttress of 'State and Throne', the broad conception of Islam needed some narrowing down and its practice some remodelling. As we shall see, this has indeed been achieved.

Let me first say a few words about the motives which induced individuals and whole communities in Nupe to embrace the new faith. The Fulani did not resort to mass conversions imposed by force. But the prestige value implicit in this creed of a ruling class was only one of its inducements. It offered, besides, two more specific material advantages. First, conversion to Islam promised safety from slavery; secondly, the patronage of nobility, which peasants and craftsmen would seek for economic reasons as well

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as to secure legal protection, involved accepting the religion of the rulers.[1] The rough and ready conversions which were the result cannot have involved any elaborate rules of spiritual preparation. Indeed, during the early Fulani regime, there were no such rules, though there was a set procedure. A man declaring to his chosen patron, not to any member of the clergy, that he wished to become a Mohammedan, and the gift, in return, of a turban and sword, sealed at once the conversion and the grant of patronage. Today, the procedure is, at least in theory, a little more elaborate and less worldly. The would-be convert is supposed to turn to a mallam for the necessary tuition, which is brief and superficial, consisting only in memorizing a few *surat* of the Qoran. In due course, he will make the declaration of faith (that is, speak the first *surah*) during the service in the mosque, after which he can don a turban, the visible sign of the accomplished conversion. A few older men I met had in fact undergone this procedure. But nowadays most adults as it were slip into Islam; they simply decide to attend the mosque (however irregularly), to perform the prescribed observances (however perfunctorily), and to exchange the indigenous phrygian caps for turbans. They may, however, seek tuition afterwards, many mallams having such 'self-made' Mohammedans among their pupils. The younger people professing Islam have mostly grown up in that faith; many received tuition in a Qoran school in their youth; others merely had parents who, in spite of their own pagan beliefs, arranged for their children a birth and naming ceremony in Mohammedan style.

The observances followed by the Nupe Mohammedans are as simple and liberal as is the procedure of conversion. The five basic duties of Islam—bearing witness to the One God; reciting the five daily prayers (*salât*); giving alms; observing the Fast (Ramadhan); and making the pilgrimage to Mecca—are, for most Nupe, reduced to two. When you ask a Nupe what makes a Mohammedan, the answer is invariably this—*ji salla* (i.e., saying the daily prayers) and keeping the Fast. The declaration of faith in One God has slipped into the background of things taken for granted. This is not unnatural; since the traditional belief of the Nupe knows one deity only, as abstract and remote as the God of Islam, the testimony to His uniqueness strikes no one as a point of great importance. Nor are the Nupe greatly exercised over the finer theological distinctions between *Sokó* and *Allah*; mostly they regard them as two names for the same being. The giving of alms (*sádaka*) is, as we know, embodied in numerous institutional occasions; but it is regarded merely as a desirable thing, not as an obligation in its own right, deserving to be listed among the

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 142–3.

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Kede

634 measure of independence in taxation, jurisdiction, and political management in general.[1]

634 669 In this connexion, we must point out an important development in the history of Nupe kingdom, which in turn greatly affected Kede history. The royal dynasty of Nupe, which traced its origin back to the mythical Tsoede, was in power till the earlier half of last century, when Nupe kingdom, like most of the Native states in Northern Nigeria, fell under the rule of Emirs of Fulani stock who had conquered the country and deposed the indigenous kings. We have no data on the relation between Kede autonomy and the Nupe State under the old dynasty. But it is certain that under Fulani rule conflicts constantly arose, partly perhaps because the Kede (like many other Nupe sections) resented the alien rule, but to a large extent certainly because the Fulani kings, much more than the Nupe rulers before them, had to curb in their own interest the autonomous leanings of their Kede vassals. The Fulani, whose wars at that time were directed chiefly against tribes in the south, could not afford to let an all too independent section control the river—the southern boundary and at the same time the vital artery of trade and traffic of the country. Slave trade, the economic mainstay of the pre-British rulers of central Nigeria, traffic in arms and powder, and troop transports for their military expeditions, all had to cross the River Niger on Kede territory.[2] The Fulani overlords enforced their sovereignty in a number of wars and punitive expeditions, in the course of which (if the reports are true) hundreds were killed, thousands of Kede sold as slaves by the victorious Fulani, Kede notables executed in Bida, and whole districts of Kede country devastated. A typical instance is the Katcha War—the answer of the Fulani to the first attempt of

174 697 [1] There exists certain evidence to show that the Kede chiefs succeeded in enlarging their judicial power at the cost of their overlords and usurped a certain judicial machinery of the Nupe State which had evolved in the river area. To-day, at any rate, the Kede claim that this judicial machinery was under the authority of the *Kuta*, while other, non-Kede, informants state that it represented entirely a prerogative of the kings of Nupe. I am referring to the *Ledu* (lit. prison) villages on the banks of the Niger, which were so called because they served as prisons and places of execution for criminals convicted, by the king's court, of a 'crime of the king'. I have described this system and the attempts of the Kede to claim it as their own in *Man* (1935), 143.

[2] The importance, for example, of Raba as a river port for slave traffic to the south is pointed out by Lander (*Journal of an Expedition* (1832), ii, p. 298). Laird and Oldfield speak of 600 Kede canoes, 'all of which may be employed for Ful troops to cross the Niger on war expeditions' (op. cit., ii, p. 315).

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the supremacy of Idah, and established the independent Nupe kingdom which is eventually to become one of the most powerful native states in Nigeria.[2]

II.

The chain is the sacred relic of all *ledu* villages. It protects the village from sickness, and gives fertility to the women. But it has yet another, more special, meaning. It is also called *'ti dzana*, the 'head of Dzana,' and the story goes that Tsoede inaugurated the chain by beheading his own maternal uncle, Dzana, and placing head and chain together on the wooden tray as a permanent symbol for his power over life and death. From that day the chain remained an instrument of execution, and the villages which possess it are the ones to perform the execution; they are the 'king's hangmen.'[3] The jurisdiction over grave crimes lay in the hands of the king. They were actually termed *leiši nyá 'tsu*, 'crimes of the king.' But whenever such a grave crime was committed, the king had to summon the help of the *ledu*. The criminal was brought to the king's residence first. The king would then try the case, invoke the sacred ordeal, and pass the sentence. Then his own men would bring the criminal to the place of the execution, as a rule the *ledu* village situated nearest to the place of the crime. There men from the village put the criminal in irons, and led him into the bush where nobody could see him, tied the sacred chain round his neck, and strangled him. Finally they buried the corpse in the bush, and returned to their village, announcing to the king's messenger that 'everything had been done.'

The crimes which were regarded as such 'king's crimes' were: theft during the night, and big theft (*e.g.*, of cattle, or a horse); murder; and the crime of *lèse majesté*. In this case the *ledu* did not kill the criminal, but only flogged him severely, and drove him out of the territory of Nupe. In case the criminal was a man of high rank, perhaps of the ruling family, only the head towns, Jebba or Tada, could perform the execution.

Three men were the executioners in every village, and one amongst them was invariably the *ndáce*, the 'father of the shooting,' *i.e.*, the head of the hunter guild. There is a deep meaning in this. For a hunter is not only a man trained in hunting and killing, but he also possesses that essential magic which, after the act of killing, can expiate the deed, and propitiate the spirit of the dead. And through this element of propitiatory magic the killing of the guilty criminal is distinguished from all other killing. It ceases to be mere inflicting of death. It gains the dignity of a sacred office, and an almost ritual act.

Whether such beliefs went deeper than this: whether there existed a general superstition which made the people shrink from the idea of inflicting death on natives of their own village, and thus made them entrust this uncanny work to people from other places, or to people protected by special magic, I dare not decide. There certainly exists still to-day a strong repugnance against having to do with all matters concerning death, and in particular unnatural death. Even the ordinary burial is carried out in secret, by one special family in every village which alone possesses the magical knowledge of burying the dead. But should a person be killed by lightning, or found murdered, no native of the village would come near the dead, but people from another village (or perhaps a village known for its special magic) would be called to perform this mysteriously perilous work. Yet, on the other hand, I have positive evidence that in certain places of Nupe, outside the

[2] A few words only about the possible historical basis of this tradition. According to the existing, very detailed, genealogies of the Nupe kings, Tsoede's life fell into the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time Idah is said to have been, since long, under the supremacy of Benin. Now the big bronze figures at Jebba and Tada are cast in *cire perdue*, the same technic as the famous Benin bronzes—and a technic which does not exist, at least not in the same perfection, in Nupe country to-day. The chains and irons, finally, are evidently of European origin. They must have been brought into Nigeria by the Portuguese who, as we know, had established close contact, and an extended slave trade, with the king of Benin by the end of the fifteenth century. From Benin the bronze figures and chains might have reached Idah, and eventually Nupe, by the natural highway for trade and traffic, the Niger.—About the bronze figures see also Max, 1931, 261, and 1934, 193.

[3] The *ledu* are also known by the name *dagari nya Tsoede*, lit. the policemen of Tsoede. *Dagari*, however, is a Hausa word, which might have been adopted more recently. In one or two places I actually found an older term still remembered: *tete-cipheci*, lit. the executioner-medicineman. This term evidently refers to the magical element connected with this office.

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sphere of influence of the *ledu*-organization, death penalty was executed, though in secrecy, by the people of the village themselves. But however this be, the actual issue is little affected. For even if there had existed this strong superstitious belief, the problem for us here is that it should be made use of in such a special way. The belief, the sentiments expressed in the belief, and the political institution in which they crystallize, are two entirely different things. The political system of Nupe kingdom, creating the *ledu*-organization, might actually only have adopted existing motives and ideas; but then it lent its own most sacred symbolism to their support, and at the same time formed out of their psychological appeal a rigid judicial monopoly, and a political office which almost comes to deny its origin: for the office of the *ledu* includes as we have seen also cases which have nothing more to do with death, namely the flogging of those who abused the name of the king; and ordinary flogging was done in every Nupe village.

III.

More than a hundred years of Mohammedan law, decades of civil war and political changes, were not powerful enough to break the spiritual influence of the *ledu* institution, the belief in its ordeals, and the sacredness of its office. But they have been able to obliterate certain details of its organization. One point in particular it is difficult to ascertain to-day: who was actually entitled to make use of the organization of 'Tsoede's hangmen'?

I found two different, and conflicting, interpretations. According to the first, the power of the *ledu* was limited to the river, and the authority over the *ledu* was, from Tsoede's time almost up till now, given into the hands of the chief of one section among the Nupe, the Kyedya. The people who call themselves Kyedya are the most powerful among the riverain Nupe. They are the canoe- and fishermen on the main river; they monopolize river traffic and trade, they look down upon their neighbours, and style themselves the 'Lords of the Waters.' They are united in a very strongly centralized political organization, and their head is the chief of Muregi, who holds the ancient hereditary title of *kuta*. The *kuta*, then, is said to be the legitimate head of the ledu organization. But a second version says that the office of the *ledu* comprised the whole country (or at least stretched inland as well), and that the power over the *ledu* belonged exclusively to the *etsu*, or kings, of the Nupe —the kings who were till the Fulani conquest the direct descendants of Tsoede.

Weighing evidence against evidence, the situation seems to be this:—Originally an organization of the Nupe king the *ledu* system was adopted later by the Kyedya. In the beginning the Nupe king alone was entitled to act through the *ledu* organization. Geographical and historical facts, reflected in the mythology of their ancestor-king, account for the connection with the river area: the territory of the young Nupe kingdom were the river banks. The river Niger, *nddduma*, as the Nupe call it, 'Father Niger,' marks the path of the mythical Tsoede where he set out to unite the Nupe into a powerful kingdom. Even later, in historical times, when the Nupe state extended far across central Nigeria, the capitals always remained near the river: Gbara, Jima, Mokwa and Raba.[4] But also economically the Niger was the life centre of the country. The welfare of a large section of the population depended on the river. And traffic and trade, so immensely important in Nupe culture, were bound up with the Niger. What appears, then, in the context of myth as the path of the ancestor-king of Nupe, plays in the actual tribal life the rôle of a 'King's Highway,' of a vital artery of the political and economic organism over which the king extends his own special, sacred authority. Violation of the law in this area means the violation of this sacredness; and crimes committed here became crimes of a special sort, subject to a special jurisdiction which has the meaning more of a sacred vengeance than of an ordinary punishment.

When, however, during the Fulani wars the political centre moved away from the river, finally to Bida, the present capital of Nupe, the original organization of the *ledu* must have lost force and significance. And then it was, as our evidence points out, that the Kyedya claimed the title over the *ledu*. The power over the river was now theirs, unquestioned. The Kyedya, hostile to the Fulani invaders, always boasting with their ancient lordship over the waters, and regarding themselves still in the days of British rule as equal to the king of Bida, seized this organization which seemed a

[4] *See* the map in my article on *Nupe State and Community* (AFRICA, VIII, 3).

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631 693 weapon so well suited to their hands. And in their small 'state within the state' this jurisdiction over the 'King's Highway' was still working, a true if smaller copy of the old system, some thirty or forty years ago.

IV.

681 693 642 The *Idu* villages are, as we have seen, linked with the king's person by special sacred links; they are made to share the king's guardianship over the law; they thus visibly represent, and almost propagate, the supreme power of the king at what we are tempted to call 'strategic' places. And in this, it seems to me, an important general sociological issue is involved. Strict centralization of legal power, however strong a machinery for political integration it seems, always harbours a disintegrative element as well. For it tends to separate the crime as actually committed from the final act of justice. The element of retaliation and atonement, so essential to the savage mind, becomes meaningless where the criminal is tried and punished a hundred miles away, and by people who are, practically, strangers. The individual community is deprived of one of the most powerful elements of social cohesion, namely, the title to sanction the violation of its laws and of its social order within its own boundaries. It appears to be the meaning of the *Idu* organization to neutralise this influence for that vital area of the Niger valley. For the most conspicuous, final, phase of jurisdiction is returned to a certain extent to the individual community. It is true this applies only to a few selected places. But we remember their surprising regular distribution on the river; and also the rule that the *Idu* village nearest to the place of the crime had to be called upon to perform the execution. These villages are 'representative' places, and 'strategic' places, and their selection is backed by the strongest charter: mythical and religious belief.

S. F. NADEL.

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